

SEA of IDIOTS

Max Wilson turned thirty five last month. He lives with his mother. He likes alternative music; especially anything from England. Max tried college for a year, but was constantly getting into arguments with the professors, mainly about economics. Max is obsessed with money. This is quite ironic being that he's unemployed. In fact, Max refuses to even look for a job. It's all beneath him. His mother spoils him, and justifies her son's apathy. He's just special. That's what she tells herself. Max's father left when he was four. Max doesn't remember him. The Christmas cards quit coming twenty years ago. The last one had a picture of his father and a Hispanic boy.

"Mother. Can you bring my dinner?"

"Just a minute honey."

Max's room was the biggest. He did important things in there. He listened to vinyl records, chatted on the computer with economic professors, ate Chinese takeout, and wrote occasional poems when the mood struck.

"Hurry mother. I'm hungry!"

"I'm on my way dear."

Max heard his mother climbing the stairs. The chicken pot pie smelled delicious.

He hoped she remembered to bring his buttermilk. Max had a penchant for it.

“Mother. Where is my buttermilk?”

“Heavens forgive me. I’ll go back and fetch it.”

“Thank you mother.”

Max flipped the record over, and hit play. The album opened with a flurry of blistering guitars. Max bobbed his head, and sat down at the computer.

Somebody knocked on the door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me. I got your buttermilk.”

“Is the pot pie hot?”

“I believe so.”

“Good. You know how cold food upsets my stomach.”

“Yes dear. Can we talk a minute son?”

“Not now mother. I have a chat with Professor Hensley.”

“A chat right now?”

“Yes mother. Come back later.”

Jan Wilson grew up in Lufkin. The East Texas town in the Piney Woods. She married John Wilson right out of high school. Two years later, she was pregnant with Max. Her son was the biggest baby born in Angelina County. Jan didn't know if the record still stood, but Max did a good job of maintaining his weight. John left a few years later, and Jan took to several jobs to make ends meet. She waited tables, worked in a library, and was a substitute teacher for awhile. The latter was her least favorite. The kids were awful.

Jan knew her son was different. Max was extremely bright. He started reading before nursery school, and soon began getting into arguments with his teachers. The school administrators suggested a gifted program, but Max got into a fight with his history teacher. Max was kicked out. The rest of her son's academic career was uneventful. Max rarely did anything in class, but aced his tests. It came as no surprise, when Max got a perfect score on his college entrance exam. He had scholarship offers to many prestigious universities, but opted for Angelina Junior College. Max was forced out his first year, after leading a revolt against the Economics Department.

Max put on a record. A British group called The Pink Underground. He

swayed in his chair, and snapped his fingers.

“Can you see me?” asked Professor Hensley.

“Of course. I have my webcam set. Let’s get started,” Max said.

“I want my students to see,” Hensley said.

Max laughed sarcastically.

“Good evening students and distinguished faculty. We are pleased to continue our series of debates on global monetary policy. Once again, we welcome our guest Max Wilson. A distinguished speaker and author of numerous economic articles. Good evening Max.”

“Good evening.”

“Max. I’m getting a little feedback. Do you have music on in the background?”

“The Pink Underground.”

“Excuse me?”

Max took a swig of buttermilk, and shoved pot pie in his mouth.

“I’m still hearing music,” Hensley said.

Max reached over, and turned down the volume.

“How’s that?”

“Much better. Let’s see the topic was central bank policy last time. Care to add thoughts Max?”

“What policy? You mean printing money,” Max responded.

Hensley’s students started laughing, when they saw the gigantic head of Max Wilson. The Chicago Cubs baseball cap pulled down to his eyes, and pot pie crumbs on the sides of his mouth.

“Can you explain what you mean by money printing?” asked Hensley.

“Quantitative easing,” Max belched.

“Explain what that means to our audience,” Hensley said.

“Money printing.”

“Care to elaborate?”

“No.”

“Central banks are taking the necessary steps to save the global economy by implementing quantitative easing,” Hensley said.

“They certainly are not,” Max chimed.

“What is your suggestion Max?”

“Do nothing.”

“Do nothing? You think the central banks should sit idly by and let the global economy implode?”

“Yes.”

“Please explain.”

“Central bank policy created the environment of mal investment. The easy money created the housing collapse. The banks gambled by throwing fire on the rigged casino, thanks to a central bank’s low interest rate policy. Same thing brought on the Great Depression,” Max said.

“Hold on Max. Why mention the Great Depression?”

Jan started knocking on the door.

“Not now mother. I’m in a debate.” Max stood up and knocked over the webcam. Hensley’s class erupted in laughter.

“It appears we’ve lost transmission. Let’s see if our guest can reconnect,” Hensley said.

“I said not now mother. I’ve lost them. See what you made me do.”

“Sorry dear. Can we can talk a minute?”

“No. I’ve got to fix the webcam. I think you broke it.”

“I’m sorry. Didn’t mean to startle you. I keep getting these bills in the mail from a company in England. Do you know who BANG Records are?”

“Don’t worry about it. Can you go warm up my pot pie? It’s cold.”

“These bills are expensive. The last one was almost two hundred dollars.”

“Just warm up my pot pie. I can’t finish the debate. You’re going to have to go to Radio Mart and buy me a new webcam.”

“Are you ordering records?”

She surveyed her son’s bedroom. The walls were lined with shelves of vinyl albums. Each record had a plastic sleeve on it, and there were little letter tabs for organization.

“Why would you think that mother?”

“No reason.”

“Get me a webcam. Warm up my pot pie. I need a chilled glass of buttermilk.”

“Are the packages on the porch records?”

“No mother.”

“I just can’t pay these bills. We don’t have the money.”

“Relax. Your concern will soon drift away.”

“I’m not blaming you son.”

“Don’t worry mother. I’ll look into it,” Max said.

“Thank you son.”

Jan went back downstairs. She thought her son might be lying, but it soon passed.

Max sat at his writing desk. He picked up the phone.

“BANG Records.”

“It’s me.”

“What’s shaking Max?”

“Just the usual. What you got in this week?”

“Got a few imports from Dark Sky. There’s live album from Weeder.”

“Dark Sky. Sounds good. I like Weeder too. Send them.”

“You got it Max. Get those out in the morning.”

“What did you think of Dark Sky’s last album?” asked Max.

“I liked it. It was obviously influenced by shoe gaze.”

“I agree. I hear a little dream pop in there too,” Max said.

“You’re right.”

“Sounds good. I’ll look for the records.”

Max hung up the phone. He was still fuming from talking to Hensley. The

guy called himself a professor. His views were dim-witted at best.

“All Keynesian lies,” Max said to himself.

There were a few pot pie crumbs in his beard, so he licked them into his mouth. Max had a busy day tomorrow. He was going to give a lecture.

Jan went to Radio Mart.

“Have you got any of those computer cameras?”

“Excuse me?” the clerk said.

“My son has an important meeting. He needs a camera to talk to a professor.”

“I bet your son needs a webcam.”

“That’s it.”

The clerk reached under the counter, and grabbed the most expensive one he could find.

“Here you go.” The clerk handed the camera to Jan.

“That will be two fifty three with tax,” the clerk said.

“Two hundred and fifty dollars? Lord have mercy,” Jan said.

“That’s actually a cheaper model,” the clerk said.

“Lord have mercy.” Jan thought a minute. She pictured poor Max sitting in his room.

“Do you take checks?”

“Of course.”

Jan wrote the check. It was expensive, but Max loved chatting with them professors. She wasn't sure on what topic.

Max reached into the desk drawer, and grabbed an extra webcam. He set it up, and got the professor back on chat.

“Welcome back Max. Glad to see you got your issue resolved.”

“I believe you were trying to justify the central bank policy,” Max said.

“I think you were talking about the Great Depression,” Hensley said.

“No time for that professor.”

Max took a swig of buttermilk. It was warm, and his stomach bubbled.

“I think you mentioned quantitative easing, care to explain to my students how the central banks are using this monetary tool?”

“Your professor is an idiot,” said Max.

The students erupted with laughter. Hensley could be seen blushing, but

maintained his composure.

“Let’s be professional.”

“Just good natured ribbing professor. Seriously he’s an idiot. I’d say the central bank policy is an utter failure.”

“What do you suggest then?” asked Hensley

“The banks need to restructure. Mark off their losses and default. They’re nothing but walking zombies,” Max replied.

“I disagree. The banks are sitting on record amounts of capital. The latest stress tests are positive,” chimed Hensley.

“Fool! The banks are the root of the problem. It starts with the unregulated Federal Reserve Bank. Which by the way is about as federal as Federal Express,” said Max.

“There you go again, blaming the Federal Reserve,” laughed Hensley

“It’s true professor. Their reckless monetary policy created the disaster. The central bank needs to be audited. It’s long overdue,” said Max.

“Do you want to tell my students about the Federal Reserve?”

“Do you teach your students anything? Why do I have to explain?”

“I believe we’re almost out of time,” Hensley said.

“Thank goodness. I can’t tolerate anymore.”

“Thank you Max,” the professor said.

Hensley’s class roared in the background. Max shut off the webcam. He needed to gather his thoughts for tomorrow. Max laid down. He put on headphones, and hit play on his turntable. The sounds of The Pink Underground filled his ears, and his eyelids grew heavy. Sleep was almost there, but a knock on the door woke him.

“Go away!”

“It’s me son. I got your camera and hot a pot pie. A chilled glass of buttermilk too.”

“Not hungry anymore. I’m going to the college tomorrow. Make sure and wake me up. My brunch needs to be ready. I can’t be late.”

“Let me bring in your camera. The man said it’s a nice one.”

“Alright mother. Slide it under the door.”

“I don’t think it will fit.”

“Set it by the door. I can’t be disturbed.”

“Yes son.”

Jan could be heard walking down the stairs. Max got up, and went to get the webcam.

“This is a piece of crap,” Max thought.

He walked back in his room, and tossed it in the desk drawer.

Max walked to Angelina Junior College. The school had gotten a new dean five years ago, and Max was able to smooth things out despite his torrid past. He offered to give lectures in the Advanced Economics class, although there was nothing advanced about Angelina Junior College. The college was about a mile from Max's house, but it was a chore for him to walk. The East Texas humidity beat down on him. Max could feel the sweat dripping through his Chicago Cubs hat, so he pulled it further down. His beady eyes squinted to shield the sun. By the time Max arrived on campus, it appeared he'd just gotten out of the shower.

"Max. Professor White is expecting you," the secretary said.

"I'll be there in a minute."

"You look hot," the secretary said.

"Thanks. I try to keep in shape."

"I mean you're sweating," the secretary said.

"Oh."

Max walked down the hall.

“Come in Max. We’ve been expecting you. My students always look forward to your lectures,” White said.

“I’m here.”

White’s students laughed when Max entered the class, followed by applause. The students loved Max’s lectures, in fact they’d much rather have him as their professor. Max walked to the front of the class, and stood behind the podium. He never used notes.

“You guys are talking about the history of the central bank. Is that right?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sure your distinguished professor has told you some rather uncouth tale about its conception.”

The class laughed.

“I’m here to set the record straight. The central bank has taken various forms in the United States, which is the focus of my lecture. Instead of talking about those variations, I’d like to center on the Federal Reserve Bank that we have today. The very entity that sets monetary policy at home but also globally.”

Max could feel the sweat building up on his forehead. He pulled the cap further down his face. His eyes were barely visible, and he often stopped to dab his face with a tissue. Max spoke for about twenty minutes, often making comparing economic policy to pop music. The class seemed confused at times, but found the whole thing humorous.

“I conclude that your professor is a brainwashed Keynesian.”

The class was silent. Professor White scribbled down a few notes.

“Thank you Max. Would you like to field some questions?”

“Just a few. I am expecting a package at home.”

A female student raised her hand in the front row.

“You talked about the central bank as the root of the economic crisis; can you explain what you mean?”

“I covered this thoroughly in my lecture. If your distinguished professor taped the lecture, perhaps he can go over it in class,” Max said.

“Anybody else have a question?” asked White.

A student raised his hand in the back of the class.

“Can you explain how The Pink Underground compares to interest rates?”

Max liked this question.

“I should have gone into more detail, but basically The Pink Underground sets the bar for garage rock in the same way the Fed sets interest rates. The latter is the king of interest rates. The Pink Underground are the kings of shoe gaze.”

The class seemed even more confused.

Max spent enough time with the junior college students, so he said goodbye and left. The students could be heard clapping all the way down the hall. Max waddled past the secretary, and back into the Texas heat.

“Those mullets deserve someone like White,” Max thought.

Max’s throat was parched, so he walked to Ames Chicken. He wanted chicken tenders and a glass of buttermilk. The folding money was in his front pocket. He pilfered it from mother’s purse earlier in the day.

Jan went to her bridge club. The group met once a week, although Jan attended twice a month. The leader of the group was Alice Walker; the pastor's wife.

"How things been honey?" asked Alice

"Alright. Max got me busy."

"Where is your son?" asked Alice.

"He's down at the college. Giving a talk."

"What about?" asked Alice.

"Not sure. Max says it's important."

"Lord have mercy. Your son lives at home. Girl it's time to set him free. He needs a job," Alice said.

"Max is special. I need him. He's always been a sensitive child," Jan said.

"Special? How old is he now? You need to live your life. The Bible talks about leave and cleave."

"He turned thirty five. Max can't cleave. He only had one girlfriend. She broke his heart. Max say she don't like him talking about money."

"Money? He doesn't even have a job," Alice laughed.

"I suppose you're right," Jan said.

"You pay all the bills. Make him get a job."

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